Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics

2003–2004

Provincial Report

EQAO
Education Quality and Accountability Office

November 2004

Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, 2003–2004

Provincial Report

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Marguerite Jackson
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Foreword

The Education Quality and Accountability Office is pleased to present this analysis of data from the Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics. These assessments were conducted during the spring of 2004 at schools within the province's district school boards and provincial school authorities.

The analysis provides a comparison of the 2003–2004 results with those of previous years. It examines changes in the percentages of students at both grade levels and in each subject who achieved the province's established standard as well as other levels. It also looks at results by gender and for students with special needs and those identified by schools as ESL/ELD learners. In addition, the report examines trends over time for the province.

A companion document to this report, *Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, 2003–2004: Detailed Data Tables of Provincial Results,* may be found on the EQAO Web site, www.eqao.com.

As outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8,* the province has established Level 3 as the standard for student achievement. EQAO develops curriculum-based assessments that measure student achievement relative to this standard.

The following is a summary of key results for 2003–2004, which are presented in detail in this report.

Grade 3
Percentage of students who performed at or above the provincial standard:
- Increased by 4% in reading to 54%
- Increased by 3% in writing to 58%
- Increased by 7% in mathematics to 64%

Grade 6
Percentage of students who performed at or above the provincial standard:
- Increased by 2% in reading to 58%
- Remained level in writing at 54%
- Increased by 4% in mathematics to 57%

This year's assessment results suggest that school and board strategies for improvement are having a positive impact. In both Grades 3 and 6, there has been a steady improvement in student achievement over the past five years. There has been progress both for students with special needs and for ESL/ELD learners.

However, the data indicate areas for future focus. Additional improvement will be required to reach the provincial goal of a minimum of 75% of Grade 6 students achieving the provincial standard by 2008. Of particular note is the achievement gap that persists between girls and boys, particularly in reading and writing, in both Grades 3 and 6.

The overall results for the EQAO Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, 2003–2004, are encouraging. The literacy and numeracy initiatives in place across the province have used data as a tool to inform professional practice and dialogue. Continuing attention to EQAO data, school data and local contextual factors will be key to overcoming challenges and ensuring schools are places where children and youth find success.

In this report, we provide profiles of schools that are using data to inform their teaching, with the result of notable student achievement. I am particularly pleased to acknowledge these schools as examples of effective school improvement and positive change.

Marguerite Jackson
Chief Executive Officer

Contents

Message from the Chair viii

Results at a Glance: Grade 3 1

Results at a Glance: Grade 6 3

Grade 3 Trends 5

Grade 6 Trends 13

School and School Board Improvement Planning 21

Strategies for Instruction 23

Successful Schools: Case Studies 29

The EQAO Assessment Process 39

Jerry G. Ponikvar
Chair, Board of Directors

Message from the Chair

EQAO is an arm's-length agency of the Ontario government with a mandate to evaluate and report on the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary education in the province and to make recommendations to school boards for improvement.

As part of its mandate, EQAO develops and administers province-wide assessments. The Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics are conducted at two key stages in a student's education. The results of these assessments yield individual, school, school board and provincial data on student achievement.

Working in partnership with Ontario's education community, EQAO provides parents, students, educators, administrators and the public with critical information about the public education system. EQAO prepares concise reports for schools, school boards and parents. These are available on its Web site, www.eqao.com. This year, in addition to an Individual Student Report, parents will receive information about their local school and school board, and the province.

Assessment is a critical component of the teaching and learning process. Enhancing and supporting continued improvement remains the focus of our efforts. We, along with educators, parents and other partners in the education process, share a responsibility for ensuring that every student is afforded a high-quality education. Learning prospers when we work together, sharing views about approaches that are working successfully, and identifying strategies for improvement in light of the achievement data.

We are pleased that the 2003–2004 assessment results demonstrate steady improvement over the past five years.

We recognize and value the dedication and expertise of Ontario's educators. I would also like to acknowledge the work of my colleagues on the Board of Directors, the EQAO staff and the members of EQAO's Assessment Advisory Committee. As partners in education, we are all accountable for improving student achievement.

"Accountability in the education system, then, means that information has to be available to the public, to taxpayers, and to parents, in a form that allows them to have reasonable expectations of the system, to make reasonable judgments about how well the system has performed, and to know who is responsible if they are not satisfied."

For the Love of Learning: Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, 1994

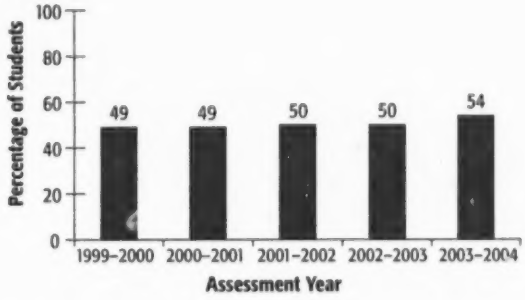
Jerry G. Ponikvar
Chair, Board of Directors

Results at a Glance: Grade 3

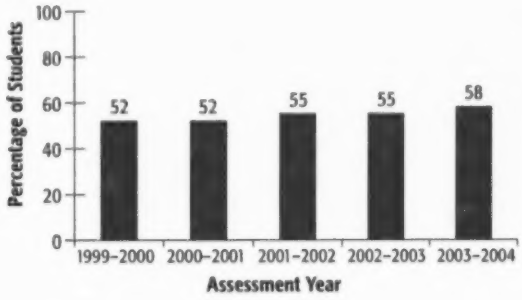
Comparison of Results over Time (percentage of all students at or above the provincial standard)

	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
1999–2000 (# = 139 904)	49%	52%	57%
2000–2001 (# = 138 422)	49%	52%	61%
2001–2002 (# = 139 727)	50%	55%	58%
2002–2003 (# = 140 860)	50%	55%	57%
2003–2004 (# = 141 245)	54%	58%	64%

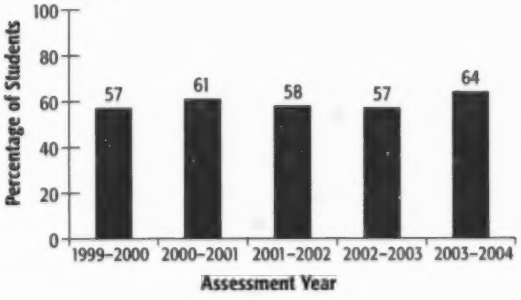
Reading



Writing



Mathematics



Observations

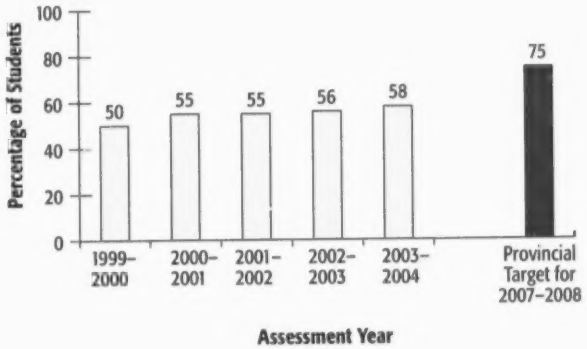
- In Grade 3, more than half the students performed at or above the provincial standard in reading (54%), in writing (58%) and in mathematics (64%).
- Results in Grade 3 reading achievement improved by 5% this year as compared to 1999–2000. Between 1999–2000 and 2002–2003, it remained stable.
- Results in Grade 3 writing achievement improved by 6% this year as compared to 1999–2000. Results show steady improvement through the past five years.
- Results in Grade 3 mathematics achievement improved by 7% this year as compared to 1999–2000. Achievement in Grade 3 mathematics has been variable over the past five years; however, the best achievement was this year.

Results at a Glance: Grade 6

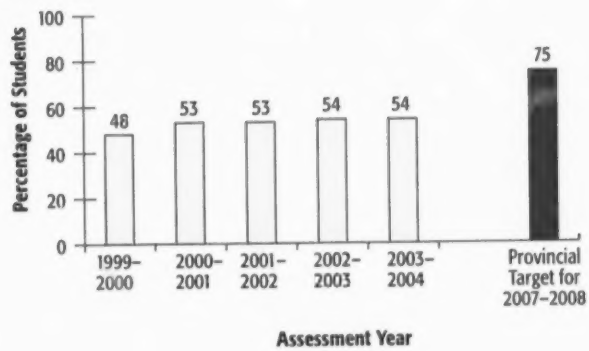
Comparison of Results over Time (percentage of all students at or above the provincial standard)

	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
1999–2000 (# = 135 578)	50%	48%	51%
2000–2001 (# = 138 191)	55%	53%	54%
2001–2002 (# = 145 351)	55%	53%	54%
2002–2003 (# = 144 676)	56%	54%	53%
2003–2004 (# = 146 169)	58%	54%	57%

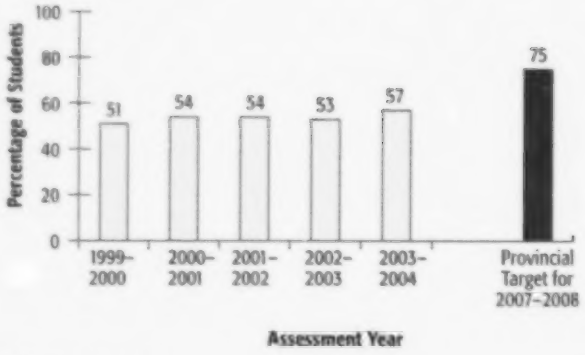
Reading



Writing



Mathematics



Observations

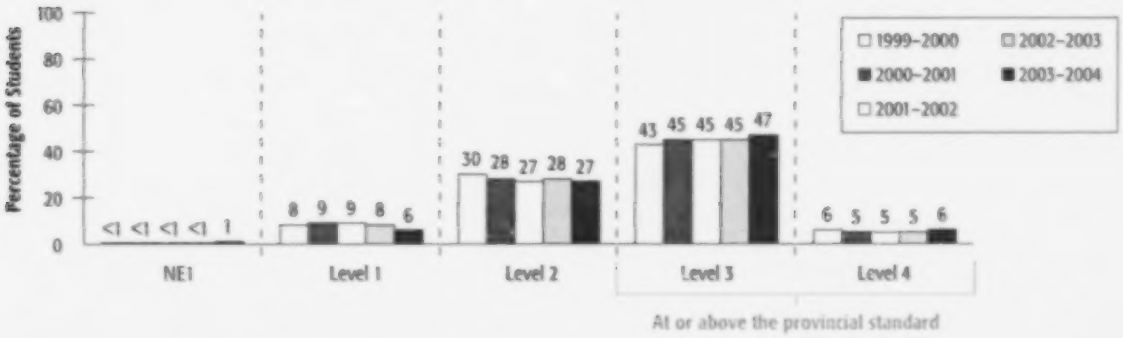
- In Grade 6, almost three-fifths of the students performed at or above the provincial standard in reading (58%) and mathematics (57%), and more than half performed at or above the provincial standard in writing (54%).
- Results in Grade 6 achievement improved by 8% for reading and by 6% for mathematics as compared to 1999–2000. For both reading and mathematics, there was improvement in 2000–2001, but then results remained stable until this year, when there were improvements once again.
- Results in Grade 6 writing achievement improved by 6% this year as compared to 1999–2000. There was improvement in 2000–2001, and since then the results have remained relatively stable.

Grade 3 Trends

Trends in Reading

		1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Percentage of Students	Level 4	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%
	Level 3	43%	45%	45%	45%	47%
	Level 2	30%	28%	27%	28%	27%
	Level 1	8%	9%	9%	8%	6%
	NE1	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
	NE1S	5%	7%	7%	8%	6%
	No Data	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Exempt	8%	6%	6%	6%	6%
	At or Above the Provincial Standard	49%	49%*	50%	50%	54%*

* These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the (rounded) percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4.



Observations

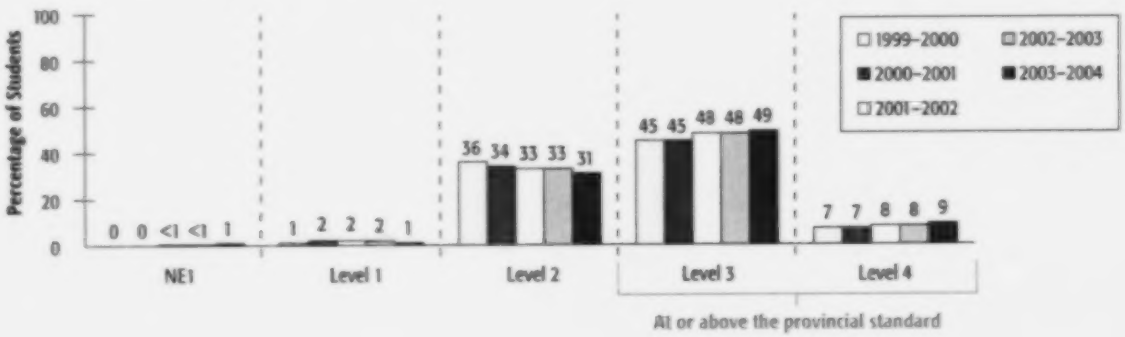
- The percentage of Grade 3 students performing at or above the provincial standard in reading increased by 4% this year compared to last year. From 1999–2000 to 2002–2003, the percentage of students at or above the provincial standard for reading remained relatively stable.
- In reading, the percentage of students who performed at Level 4 has remained stable over the past five years.
- In reading, the percentage of students at Level 3 increased this year after being stable for the previous three years.
- In reading, the percentage of students at Level 2 has remained stable over the past four years.

- In reading, the percentage of students at Level 1 decreased this year after being stable for the previous four years.
- The percentage of students with reading achievement at NE1 (students who did not demonstrate enough evidence of knowledge and understanding to be assigned Level 1) increased slightly this year but continues to be very low.
- The percentage of Grade 3 students who were exempted from reading has remained stable at 6% over the past four years.
- The percentage of students who provided insufficient work to be scored (NEIS) decreased in reading (6%) compared to the previous year (8%).

Trends in Writing

		1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Percentage of Students	Level 4	7%	7%	8%	8%	9%
	Level 3	45%	45%	48%	48%	49%
	Level 2	36%	34%	33%	33%	31%
	Level 1	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%
	NE1	0%	0%	<1%	<1%	1%
	NEIS	4%	6%	3%	4%	3%
	No Data	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Exempt	7%	5%	5%	5%	5%
	At or Above the Provincial Standard	52%	52%	55%*	55%*	58%

* These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the (rounded) percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4.



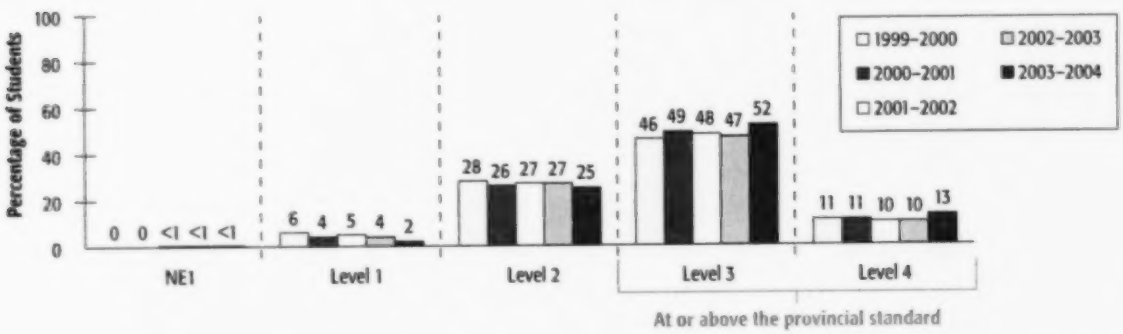
Observations

- The percentage of Grade 3 students performing at or above the provincial standard in writing increased by 3% this year compared to last year. There has been a steady improvement in Grade 3 writing achievement through the past 5 years.
- There has been a slow but steady improvement in the percentage of students at Level 4 for writing achievement over the past five years.
- In writing, the percentage of students achieving Level 3 increased by 4% compared to 1999–2000.
- There has been a steady decline in the percentage of students attaining Level 2 in writing over the past five years.
- In writing, the percentages of students at Level 1 and at NE1 (students who did not demonstrate enough evidence of knowledge and understanding to be assigned Level 1) has remained relatively stable over the past five years.
- The percentage of Grade 3 students who were exempted from writing has remained stable at 5% over the past four years.
- The percentage of Grade 3 students who provided insufficient work to be scored (NEIS) in writing has remained relatively stable over the last three years.

Trends in Mathematics

		1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Percentage of Students	Level 4	11%	11%	10%	10%	13%
	Level 3	46%	49%	48%	47%	52%
	Level 2	28%	26%	27%	27%	25%
	Level 1	6%	4%	5%	4%	2%
	NE1	0%	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	NE1S	2%	4%	5%	7%	3%
	No Data	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Exempt	6%	5%	5%	4%	5%
	At or Above the Provincial Standard	57%	61%*	58%	57%	64%*

* These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the (rounded) percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4.



Observations

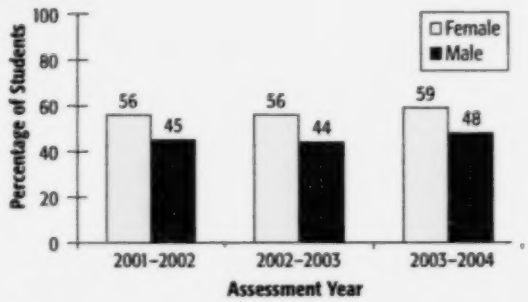
- The percentage of Grade 3 students performing at or above the provincial standard in mathematics increased by 7% this year compared to last year. Achievement in Grade 3 mathematics has varied over the past five years; however the best achievement was this year.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students at Level 4 improved this year after being stable for the previous four years.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students at Level 3 has varied over the past five years, but the best achievement was this year.
- In mathematics, the percentages of students at Level 1 and Level 2 dropped by 2% this year compared to last year.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students at NE1 (students who did not demonstrate enough evidence of knowledge and understanding to be assigned Level 1) remained stable at about 1%.

- The percentage of Grade 3 students who were exempted from mathematics has remained relatively stable at about 5% over the last four years.
- In Grade 3, the number of students who provided insufficient work to be scored (NEIS) decreased in mathematics (3%) compared to the previous year (7%).

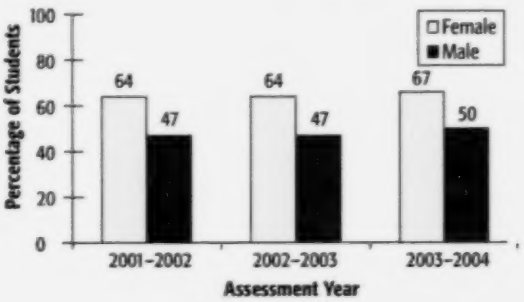
Trends by Gender (percentage of students at or above the provincial standard)

	2001–2002				2002–2003				2003–2004			
	Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%
Reading	66 112	56%	70 212	45%	66 564	56%	70 888	44%	66 576	59%	70 688	48%
Writing	66 112	64%	70 210	47%	66 564	64%	70 888	47%	66 576	67%	70 688	50%
Mathematics	67 705	59%	71 426	58%	68 142	58%	71 956	55%	68 291	65%	71 911	63%

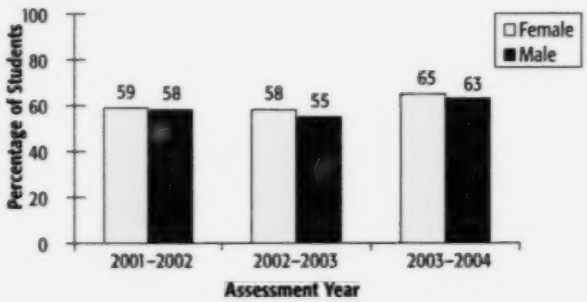
Reading



Writing



Mathematics

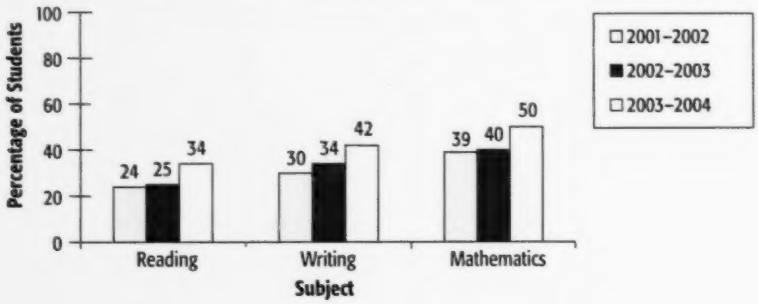


Observations

- In Grade 3 reading, the percentages of both male and female students at or above the provincial standard have improved this year compared to the previous two years.
- In Grade 3 writing, percentages of both male and female students at or above the provincial standard have increased this year compared to the previous two years.
- The gender gap in favour of girls persists in reading and writing.
- In Grade 3, 65% of female students and 63% of male students performed at or above the provincial standard in mathematics.
- There has been great improvement in both male and female Grade 3 students' achievement in mathematics this year.
- The gender gap is narrowest in mathematics.

ESL/ESD Learners (percentage of students at or above the provincial standard)

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004[1]	
	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%
Reading	7617	24%	7479	25%	8912	34%
Writing	7617	30%	7479	34%	8912	42%
Mathematics	7625	39%	7491	40%	8920	50%

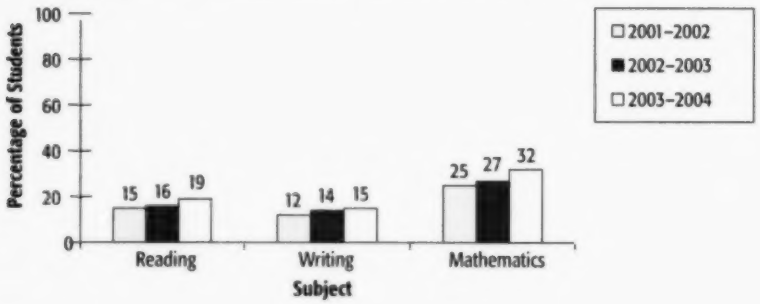


Observations

- In Grade 3, reading and mathematics achievement for ESL/ELD learners improved this year after having remained stable the previous two years.
- In Grade 3, writing achievement for ESL/ELD learners has increased over the past two years.

Students with Special Needs (percentage of students at or above the provincial standard)[2]

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004	
	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%
Reading	15253	15%	16265	16%	16687	19%
Writing	15251	12%	16265	14%	16687	15%
Mathematics	15323	25%	16338	27%	16771	32%



Observation

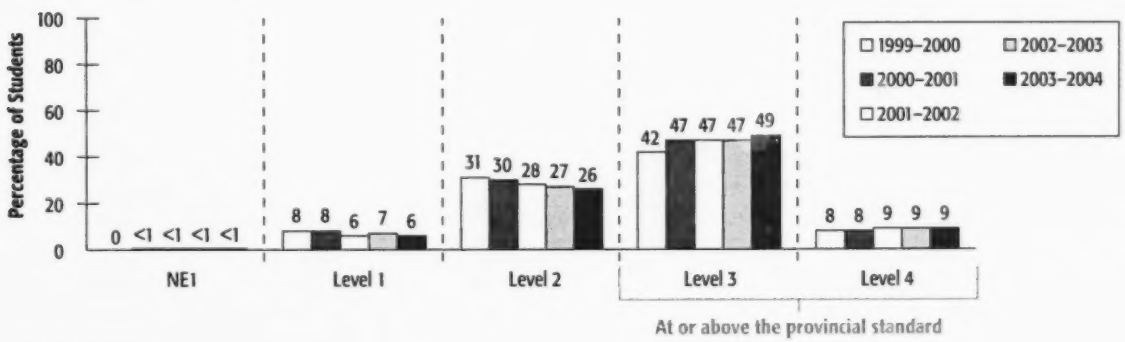
- In Grade 3, over the last three years, there has been slow but steady improvement in the percentage of students with special needs performing at or above the provincial standard in all three subjects.

Grade 6 Trends

Trends in Reading

		1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Percentage of Students	Level 4	8%	8%	9%	9%	9%
	Level 3	42%	47%	47%	47%	49%
	Level 2	31%	30%	28%	27%	26%
	Level 1	8%	8%	6%	7%	6%
	NE1	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	NEIS	5%	3%	6%	5%	5%
	No Data	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Exempt	6%	4%	4%	4%	4%
	At or Above the Provincial Standard	50%	55%	55%*	56%	58%

* These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the (rounded) percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4.



Observations

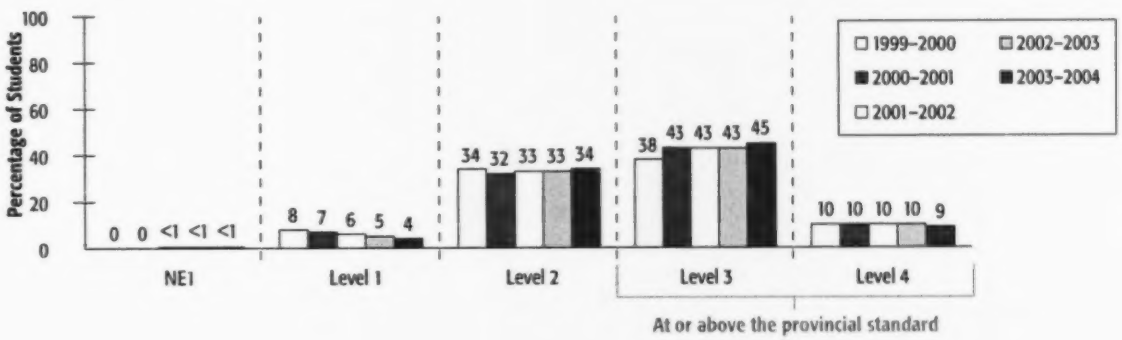
- The percentage of Grade 6 students performing at or above the provincial standard in reading increased by 2% this year compared to last year. From 2000–2001 to 2002–2003, reading achievement at or above the provincial standard has remained stable.
- In reading, the percentage of students who performed at Level 4 has remained stable over the past five years.
- In reading, the percentage of students at Level 3 increased this year after having been stable the previous three years.

- There has been a steady decrease in the percentage of Grade 6 students at Level 2 in reading achievement over the past five years.
- In reading, the percentage of students at Level 1 slightly decreased in 2001–2002 but has remained relatively stable over the past five years.
- The percentage of students with reading achievement at NE1 (students who did not demonstrate enough evidence of knowledge and understanding to be assigned Level 1) has remained stable at <1% over the past four years.
- The percentage of Grade 6 students who were exempted in reading has remained stable at 4% over the last four years.
- The percentage of students who provided insufficient work to be scored (NEIS) has remained relatively stable over the past three years.

Trends in Writing

		1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Percentage of Students	Level 4	10%	10%	10%	10%	9%
	Level 3	38%	43%	43%	43%	45%
	Level 2	34%	32%	33%	33%	34%
	Level 1	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%
	NE1	0%	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	NEIS	5%	5%	3%	3%	3%
	No Data	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Exempt	6%	4%	4%	4%	4%
	At or Above the Provincial Standard	48%	53%	53%	54%*	54%

* These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the (rounded) percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4.

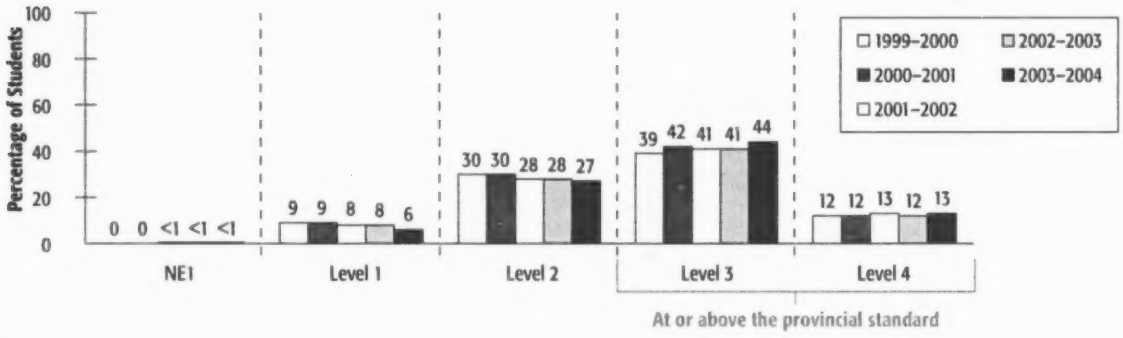


Observations

- The percentage of Grade 6 students performing at or above the provincial standard in writing has remained relatively stable over the past four years.
- In writing, the percentage of students at Level 4 has remained relatively stable over the last five years.
- There has been improvement in the percentage of students at Level 3 in writing achievement this year after it had remained stable the previous three years.
- In writing, the percentage of students at Level 2 has remained relatively stable over the past five years.
- There has been a steady decrease in the percentage of students at Level 1 in writing achievement over the past five years.
- In writing, the percentage of students at NE1 (students who did not demonstrate enough evidence of knowledge and understanding to be assigned Level 1) has remained stable at <1% over the past three years.
- The percentage of Grade 6 students who were exempted from writing has remained stable at 4% over the past four years.
- The percentage of Grade 6 students who provided insufficient work to be scored (NEIS) in writing has remained stable over the past three years.

Trends in Mathematics

		1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Percentage of Students	Level 4	12%	12%	13%	12%	13%
	Level 3	39%	42%	41%	41%	44%
	Level 2	30%	30%	28%	28%	27%
	Level 1	9%	9%	8%	8%	6%
	NE1	0%	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	NEIS	4%	3%	5%	6%	4%
	No Data	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
	Exempt	6%	4%	4%	4%	4%
	At or Above the Provincial Standard	51%	54%	54%	53%	57%



Observations

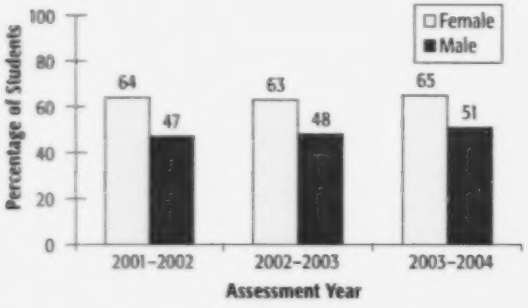
- The percentage of Grade 6 students performing at or above the provincial standard in mathematics increased by 4% this year compared to last year.
- Achievement in Grade 6 mathematics increased in 2000–2001, remained relatively stable for three years, then improved again this year.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students at Level 4 has remained relatively stable over the last five years.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students at Level 3 increased this year after having been relatively stable the previous three years.
- There has been a steady decline in the percentage of students achieving Level 2 and Level 1 in mathematics over the past five years.
- In mathematics, the percentage of students at NE1 (students who did not demonstrate enough evidence of knowledge and understanding to be assigned Level 1) has remained stable at <1% over the last three years.

- The percentage of Grade 6 students who were exempted from writing has remained stable at 4% over the last four years.
- In Grade 6, the number of students who provided insufficient work to be scored (NEIS) decreased in mathematics (4%) compared to the previous year (6%).

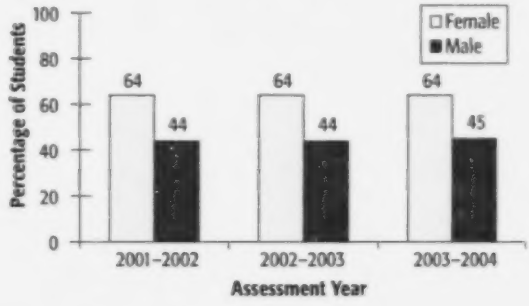
Trends by Gender (percentage of students at or above the provincial standard)

	2001–2002				2002–2003				2003–2004			
	Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%
Reading	70 309	64%	73 975	47%	70 297	63%	73 155	48%	70 913	65%	74 095	51%
Writing	70 308	64%	73 975	44%	70 297	64%	73 155	44%	70 913	64%	74 094	45%
Mathematics	70 309	55%	73 975	52%	70 297	55%	73 155	52%	70 913	60%	74 094	56%

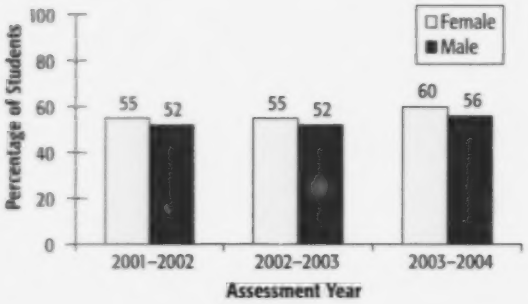
Reading



Writing



Mathematics

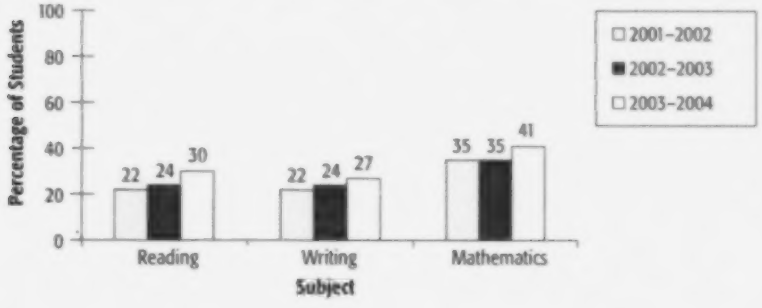


Observations

- In Grade 6 reading, the percentages of both male and female students at or above the provincial standard have increased this year compared to the previous two years.
- In Grade 6 writing, there has been a steady improvement in the percentage of male students performing at or above the provincial standard, while the percentage of female students achieving the same has remained stable.
- The gender gap in favour of girls persists in reading and writing.
- In Grade 6 mathematics, there was improvement this year compared to the previous two years in the percentage of both female and male students at or above the provincial standard.
- The gender gap is narrowest in mathematics.

ESL/ESD Learners (percentage of students at or above the provincial standard)

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004[3]	
	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%
Reading	5208	22%	4930	24%	5532	30%
Writing	5208	22%	4930	24%	5532	27%
Mathematics	5208	35%	4930	35%	5532	41%

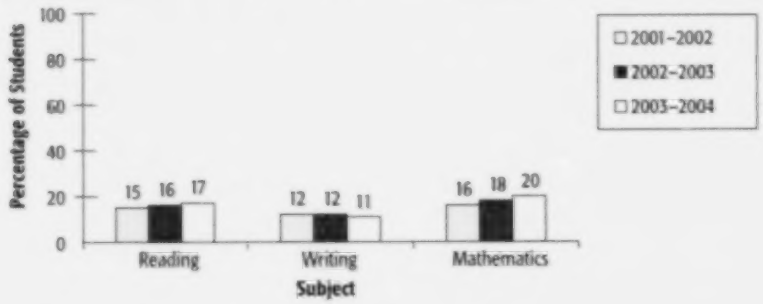


Observations

- In Grade 6, reading and writing achievement for ESL/ELD learners increased in each of the past two years.
- In Grade 6, mathematics achievement for ESL/ELD learners improved this year after being stable the previous two years.

Students with Special Needs (percentage of students at or above the provincial standard)[4]

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004	
	Total #	%	Total #	%	Total #	%
Reading	19 055	15%	19 187	16%	19 681	17%
Writing	19 054	12%	19 187	12%	19 681	11%
Mathematics	19 055	16%	19 187	18%	19 681	20%



Observations

- In Grade 6, over the last three years there has been slow but steady improvement in the percentage of students with special needs performing at or above the provincial standard in reading and mathematics.
- In Grade 6, writing achievement for students with special needs has remained relatively stable over the past three years.

School and School Board Improvement Planning

During the period 2000–2004, school boards submitted improvement plans to EQAO. Results of the 2004 Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics suggest that strategies being implemented by schools and boards are producing positive results.

Between 2000 and 2004, several school boards demonstrated significant increases in the percentage of students achieving the provincial standard. Selected improvement plans for 2002–2003 and 2003–2004 were analyzed to determine whether there were common factors among boards with notable improvement. The following are some of the key general findings:

- All of these plans provided general goals for reading, writing and mathematics and, in many cases, prioritized areas for improvement, such as reading comprehension and mathematical measurement.
- All of these plans mentioned having analyzed EQAO assessment results and trends for reading, writing and mathematics.
- Most of the action plans identified specific improvement strategies, indicators that actions had occurred, timelines for implementation and who was responsible.

Successful schools understand the importance of using data to plan for and track improvement. Improvements are achievable when school learning communities use data to establish goals and engage in co-operative activities to achieve them.

As schools and boards develop improvement plans, they are encouraged to refer to their own data as well as the following documents available on the EQAO Web site:

- *EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning* (2002)
- *Using Data to Promote Student Success: A Brief Guide to Assist School Administration in Interpreting Their Data* (2004)

EQAO commends the work of education leaders from across the province who have contributed their expertise to the development of Ontario Ministry of Education publications. EQAO supports and encourages the use of the following:

- *Early Reading Strategy: The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario*
- *Early Math Strategy: The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Math in Ontario*
- *Literacy for Learning: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4–6 in Ontario*
- *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading, Kindergarten to Grade 3*
- *Teaching and Learning Mathematics: The Report of the Expert Panel on Mathematics in Grades 4–6 in Ontario*
- *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading, Mathematics to Grade 3*

- *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8; Writing*
- *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8; Reading*
- *The Ontario Curriculum – Exemplars, Grades 1–6; Mathematics* (six separate documents)
- e-learning Web-based resources hosted by and created in co-operation with TVOntario.

All of these documents are available at the Ministry of Education's Web site, www.edu.gov.on.ca.

EQAO recognizes that school boards, principals and teachers have made literacy and numeracy instruction a priority. Having considered the 2003–2004 achievement results, the trends emerging from comparisons over time, the data collected from the Student Questionnaire and the Teacher Questionnaire and the comments from the educator scorers, EQAO recommends that school boards, school administrators and teachers continue to do the following:

Planning and Using Information

- Gather and analyze data from the EQAO results and from class, school and board sources to set literacy and numeracy goals and develop improvement plans at the board and school levels.
- Track student data over time to inform teacher practice.

Building Capacity and Expertise

- Analyze the assessment data and plan to address areas in which students have not adequately mastered the skills.
- Encourage literacy and numeracy committees and teachers across grades and subjects to share effective instructional practices.

Collaborating with Community Partners

- Connect with the community, including parents and school councils, to support student learning.

Strategies for Instruction

Areas of Focus

The *Item Information Report: School, Board, Province* was the source of the following provincial information. This report, which contains data about Grade 3 and Grade 6 students' responses to questions on this year's assessments, is available to schools and school boards on the secure portion of the EQAO Web site, www.eqao.com.

Schools and boards should consider the analysis of their own performance in light of the provincial data.

EQAO suggests that teachers consider spending additional time helping students write full answers that include accurate and specific information with clear and complete explanations.

EQAO suggests the following instructional support for building student skill in answering questions:

- Help students to understand the characteristics of a good answer when demonstrating their knowledge and understanding. A good answer includes accurate and specific information with clear and complete explanations. (Refer to student anchors and exemplars.)
- Have students identify the characteristics of good answers by analyzing answers together as a class.
- Have them explain how to improve an answer.
- Have students solve problems in mathematics by modelling ways to analyze, select and apply appropriate strategies that lead to accurate solutions and by brainstorming and discussing solutions.
- Model a variety of correct responses to a question.
- Have students recognize that there can be several strategies to solve a problem.
- Model good question-answering techniques by having the class develop answers together.
- Have two students write answers together and have another partner provide feedback to make the answers better.
- Have students write answers individually for feedback from the teacher.

Reading

Grade 3

Because analysis of Grade 3 reading data indicates that when students answer questions related to the same expectations on narrative and non-narrative reading selections they perform at a much higher level on the questions about non-narrative selections (e.g., Goose Crossing, questions 7 and 9; The Canada Goose, questions 2 and 6), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers give students more practice responding to and answering questions about non-fiction narratives.

Because fewer than 25% of Grade 3 students perform well when asked to explain how terms such as "setting" (Goose Crossing, question 2) and "non-fiction" (The Canada Goose, question 4) apply to a reading selection, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers ensure students are familiar with this kind of terminology and can explain its application to materials they read.

Because girls are more likely than boys to think they are good readers (68% vs. 64%), to like to read (69% vs.51%) and to read by themselves at home (62% vs. 56%), and because girls are more likely than boys to be at or above the provincial standard in reading (59% vs. 48%) EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- give boys every opportunity to become better readers by encouraging them to read authentic and motivating literacy texts;
- provide boys and girls with opportunities to read a variety of different genres for different purposes and
- engage in practices that support reading achievement, including a balance of direct and guided instruction, independent learning and student practice and large group, small group, and individual instruction, discussion and collaboration.

Grade 6

Because, when asked questions about reading selections that require them to "explain their interpretation with evidence from the work and from their own knowledge and experience," more than twice as many students perform well when the question can be answered with a focus on evidence from the reading selection (Early Explorers, questions 4 and 7) than when the answer to the question focuses on their own knowledge and experience (Early Explorers, questions 1 and 3), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide students with opportunities to reflect and connect their experiences with the texts they read.

Because, when asked to explain the uses of punctuation (A Viking Saga, question 6) or the meaning of prefixes and suffixes (A Viking Saga, question 10), only about 25% of students are able to answer appropriately, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers highlight the purposes of punctuation and grammatical structures in their teaching.

Because girls continue to be more likely than boys to think they are good readers (66% vs. 59%), to like to read (56% vs. 39%) and to read by themselves at home (74% vs. 60%), and because the trend from Grade 3 to Grade 6 has shown that increasingly girls are more likely than boys to perform at or above the provincial standard in reading (65% vs. 51%) EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- give boys every opportunity to become better readers by encouraging them to read authentic and motivating literacy texts;
- provide boys and girls with opportunities to read a variety of different genres for different purposes and
- engage in practices that support reading achievement, including a balance of direct and guided instruction; independent learning; independent student practice and large-group, small-group, and individual instruction, discussion and collaboration.

Writing

Grade 3

Because many students performed better when writing a story (My Adventure Story) than they did when writing a letter (Letter), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide students with more opportunities to produce non-narrative written work, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum.*

Because many students performed better on the communication and application of conventions categories than on the reasoning and organization categories on both pieces of writing (My Adventure Story and Letter), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide direct instruction to students on developing ideas of some complexity and organizing the ideas in a clear, logical and coherent manner.

Because girls are more likely than boys to think they are good writers (57% vs. 46%), to like to write (63% vs. 49%) and to write by themselves at home (61% vs. 52%) and because girls are more likely than boys to perform at or above the provincial standard in writing (67% vs. 50%), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- give boys every opportunity to become better writers by encouraging them to write, using authentic and motivating literacy text and learning activities;
- encourage and provide opportunities to boys and girls to write daily for a variety of purposes;
- address the strengths and needs of all students, ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to become successful writers and
- provide Grade 3 students with more opportunities to produce non-narrative written work, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum.*

Grade 6

Because many students performed better when writing a story (My Adventure Story) than they did when writing an information piece (Newspaper Article), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide students with more opportunities to produce non-narrative written work, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum.*

Because many students performed better on the communication and application of conventions categories than on the reasoning and organization categories on both pieces of writing (My Adventure Story and Newspaper Article), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide direct instruction to students on developing ideas of some complexity and organizing the ideas in a clear, logical and coherent manner.

Because girls continue to be more likely than boys to think they are good writers (48% vs. 40%), to like to write (50% vs. 35%) and to write by themselves at home (59% vs. 46%), and because girls are more likely than boys to perform at or above the provincial standard in writing (64% vs. 45%), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- give boys every opportunity to become better writers by encouraging them to write, using authentic and motivating literacy texts and learning activities;
- encourage and provide opportunities for boys and girls to write daily for a variety of purposes;
- address the strengths and needs of all students, ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to become successful writers and
- provide Grade 6 students with more opportunities to produce non-narrative written work, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum.*

Mathematics

Grade 3

Because about a quarter of students were unable to choose, demonstrate or explain an appropriate strategy to solve an area problem, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide students with opportunities to develop the concept of area by focusing on identifying the problem and selecting and applying appropriate tools, methodologies and terminology.

Because about one-third of the students were unable to predict accurately the probability of outcomes of a spinner game, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- model the use of manipulatives and technology as an aid to solving problems;
- demonstrate procedures on an overhead and
- provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding through projects and co-operative tasks (creating or playing math games).

Because about one-third of the students were unable to compare the attributes of three-dimensional figures, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers organize the mathematics program to teach mathematical words and terms and their mean-

ings, and provide students with opportunities to communicate their mathematical understanding by requiring them to maintain a math journal in which they explain the meanings of mathematical terms.

Because about one-third of the students were unable to identify and extend a linear pattern, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers provide students with problem-solving opportunities that require them to

- analyze problems,
- recognize that there are often several strategies used to solve a problem and
- brainstorm and discuss strategies.

Because about one-third of the students were unable to demonstrate an understanding of and an ability to apply measurement terms, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- teach mathematical words and terms and their meanings through real-life situations and
- integrate and transfer knowledge and skills through the use of manipulatives and technology.

Because boys are more likely than girls to think they are good at mathematics (62% vs. 45%) and to like mathematics (64% vs. 56%) and because girls are more likely than boys to be at or above the provincial standard in mathematics (65% vs. 63%), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- provide opportunities for girls to engage in a variety of different mathematical problems;
- provide students with opportunities to talk through mathematical concepts before writing about the concept as part of the problem-solving process and
- base their mathematical instruction on problem solving to provide students with interesting, relevant contexts.

Grade 6

Because more than one-third of the students were unable to visualize and describe the effects of translations, reflections and rotations, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- model the use of manipulatives and technology as an aid to solving transformation problems;
- demonstrate procedures that reinforce terminology and
- provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding through projects and co-operative tasks or by maintaining a math journal in which they can write about their understanding of mathematics.

Because about one-third of the students were unable to interpret displays of data and evaluate how the results represent a population, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- provide students with problem-solving opportunities that require them to analyze problems using their prior mathematical knowledge and experience;

- encourage students to use a variety of graphs to demonstrate and explain answers, and to recognize that there can be several strategies for solving a problem and
- model exemplary responses.

Because about half the students were unable to demonstrate an understanding of and an ability to apply measurement terms, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- regularly throughout the year address the required knowledge and skills across the strands to teach mathematical words and terms and their meanings and
- provide students with opportunities to communicate their mathematical understanding by requiring them to justify solutions using accurate mathematical terminology and symbols.

Because more than one-third of the students were unable to choose, carry out or explain an appropriate strategy to demonstrate an understanding of ratio, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- provide students with opportunities to develop their concepts of ratio by focusing on identifying the problem and selecting and applying appropriate tools and methodologies and
- demonstrate and model exemplary responses using numbers, pictures, charts symbols and/or words.

Because about two-fifths of the students were unable to demonstrate an understanding of, and generalize a rule for, calculating volume, EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- provide students with problem-solving opportunities that require them to
  - analyze problems and
  - recognize that there can be several strategies for solving a problem;
- brainstorm and discuss strategies and
- provide models of exemplary responses.

Because boys continue to be more likely than girls to think they are good at mathematics (60% vs. 41%), to like mathematics (55% vs. 40%) and to solve mathematics problems outside school (43% vs. 36%), even though girls are more likely than boys to perform at or above the provincial standard in mathematics (60% vs. 56%), EQAO suggests that, where applicable, teachers

- provide opportunities for girls to engage in a variety of different mathematical problems;
- provide students with opportunities to talk through mathematical concepts before writing about the concept as part of the problem solving process and
- base their mathematical instruction on problem solving to provide students with interesting, relevant contexts.

Successful Schools: Case Studies

Successful school improvement strategies

EQAO is pleased to profile three schools that offer examples of school improvement strategies that demonstrate the importance of systematic leadership, the value of using assessment data and the results a school can achieve when the commitment is shared among school leaders, staff and parents.

St. Jude Catholic Elementary School, Thunder Bay CDSB

Our profile

- Inner-city school in Thunder Bay
- Large aboriginal population
- No ESL students in Grade 3
- In Grade 6, 10% of 49 students are in ESL
- In Grade 3, 5% of 38 students have been identified as having special needs
- In Grade 6, approximately 15% of 49 students have been identified as having special needs
- All students, including special needs students, participated in the Grades 3 and 6 EQAO assessments

Our EQAO results

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004	
	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6
Number of students	41	30	25	31	38	49
Exempted students (all three subjects)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Percentage at Level 3 or above:						
Reading	46%	47%	32%	45%	82%	65%
Writing	49%	43%	48%	32%	79%	63%
Mathematics	34%	33%	36%	19%	82%	76%

Key factors in our improvement

- Development of a professional learning community in the school
- Intensive professional development guided by staff requests
- Frequent staff meetings to review student achievement
- Use of EQAO results in school-wide improvement planning
- Use of EQAO data by teachers to identify needs of individual students
- Incorporation of EQAO assessment elements in classroom practice, beginning in senior kindergarten

- Guided reading for all students each morning
- Active parent home-reading program
- Leadership shared among all staff

Our story

Over the past three years, I have had the privilege of leading a dedicated team of educators through an intensive school-improvement process that has yielded very exciting results. We have a strong, experienced team of teachers who are committed to student learning and who are willing to audit their own teaching practices and set targets for improvement. Equally important, our teaching staff is committed to setting high standards for student achievement, based on the belief that all students in our school can learn, whatever their challenges. Without these two ingredients, I don't think any genuine improvement is possible. With them, as we have discovered, schools can achieve substantial and sustainable improvement.

Our story began in 2000–2001 with our involvement in the Schools That Need Extra Help program. During that time, expert teams from the Ministry came in to help our teachers analyze their teaching practice in the classroom with a critical eye. This helped tremendously in moving the school team forward as a professional learning community. It was an opportunity for them to experience professional development beyond their wildest dreams.

We focused on three key concepts from Professor Michael Fullan (Special Advisor to the Premier and Minister of Education):

- move slowly and improvement will sustain itself
- move forward with a purpose
- move to create a culture of learning for students and staff

My role, as I saw it, was to keep staff calm throughout a stressful process and to apply the principles of "pressure and support" that Fullan talks about in moving toward positive change. I think the key point that I learned was that if you serve your teachers well, your students will be well served.

During this time, staff meetings to deal with administrative issues were reduced to two a year. Meanwhile, teachers met weekly to talk about student learning and student improvement and their own teaching practices—their successes and failures—in the area of early reading.

Another critical factor in our success, I believe, is that teachers were given permission not to be afraid of making mistakes in exploring different teaching methods, to discover what they needed in terms of professional development and to feel confident in making professional development requests, knowing that they would be supported. It really wasn't just a question of my own leadership. It was a question of the leadership that was cultivated within each teacher. For the first time, our staff felt like educators, talked like educators and genuinely felt the sense of being a part of a professional learning community focused on support—for each other, and for the children.

EQAO had a huge impact on our thinking and practice. We began to consider EQAO assessments as a part of our school improvement planning strategies and, in doing so, the staff discovered that EQAO scores led them to reflect directly on their teaching practice. Influenced by the professional learning they received from the Ministry, they gained an appreciation for the value of using EQAO data effectively and identifying gaps in student learning much earlier than would otherwise be possible.

At St. Jude, we expose students to achievement levels, higher-level thinking and the use of language that is appropriate to the assessments, right from senior kindergarten. Teachers use EQAO booklets as resources in their teaching. The result is that the higher-level thinking and comprehension skills encouraged by EQAO are embedded in our staff's teaching practice and assessments.

When students sit down to write the assessments, they recognize the elements because they are embedded in our teaching. Our students think outside the box and take risks in their responses. Needless to say, our teaching staff are very pleased. The assessments are not an anxious event for the students, because they know what to expect. They are happy and secure with the assessments. This does not mean that teachers are teaching to the assessments. Rather, they recognize that the assessment components reflect the curriculum and serve as a touchstone for understanding where students' strengths and weaknesses lie.

Another key element of our school improvement strategy has been a philosophy that everyone is responsible for student success at every grade level. For example, we have a daily ritual for all staff members through which every child is involved in a guided reading exercise by 9:30 in the morning. We have also involved parents successfully, and parent home-reading programs are active. Participation in literacy information meetings for parents of at-risk students continues to be excellent.

We have used practices and strategies based on EQAO data to write our school improvement plan. With this approach, we have been able to develop a plan of action that has led to a revitalization of our school culture. We have cultivated greater student motivation, with fewer students struggling, and clear and high expectations of students and teachers, along with support for both.

I am proud to say that our doors have now been opened to other schools searching for best practice in their school improvement planning. For example, teacher experts at St. Jude are working with principles and teachers at neighbouring schools during after-school hours to assist them with their action plans.

Our EQAO scores doubled after one year of implementation of the Schools That Need Extra Help program. The scores dipped by 10 percent in 2002–2003, but our 2003–2004 scores confirmed that we have achieved a substantial and sustainable change.

Our 2003–2004 EQAO results are a validation of our efforts over the past three years. We have created a dynamic school culture of unity, professional support, caring for students, commitment to higher-level thinking and learning, and positive attitude in our students. There is a strong sense of engagement and belonging among teachers and students, and there is tremendous, active leadership being demonstrated by all of our teachers. We have fulfilled our commitment to school improvement, and it has been a gift for me to have been involved in this journey.

Margaret Hall
Principal

Forest Manor Public School, TDSB

Our profile

- School located in Don Mills
- Forest Manor serves 700 students representing almost 30 language groups
- 83% of students have a primary language other than English
- 66% of students were born outside Canada
- 36% of students have been living in Canada two years or less
- Forest Manor is a special needs school providing extensive special education and ESL services

Our EQAO results

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004	
	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6
Number of students	90	90	82	84	83	82
Exempted students (all three subjects)	11%	12%	22%	13%	12%	17%
Percentage at Level 3 or above:						
Reading	74%	68%	70%	57%	70%	70%
Writing	66%	53%	66%	58%	71%	67%
Mathematics	86%	72%	76%	74%	84%	80%

Key factors in our improvement

- Schoolwide focus: "The entire staff takes responsibility for our results. We all own our success. Our emphasis on developing the skills necessary for student success begins in kindergarten and extends across all grades."
- Annual professional development specifically related to EQAO assessments
- Early identification of language needs
- Ongoing tracking of individual student achievement in literacy and mathematics
- Active literacy program for Grade 6 boys
- Consistent language program from junior kindergarten to Grade 3
- Resource teacher for literacy and mathematics support at each grade level
- Meetings focused on student results (e.g., each grade looked at "Next Steps" by choosing an improvement goal and detailing strategies, accommodations, assessment, tracking and connections to other areas of the curriculum)
- Family nights (language, mathematics or EQAO focus) at every grade level to help parents learn strategies to support their children's learning

Our story

We have achieved excellent results on EQAO tests even though our demographic profile places us near the top of TDSB's list of "high needs" schools. Many factors account for this, but I would say that it is our focus on the "team" approach, on individual student achievement, on professional development and on partnerships with parents, that have contributed most to our success.

Professional development

Over the past three years, through our in-school leaders (conveners,) we have focused on providing workshops on

- **raising levels** (looking at specific strategies for how to move students from a Level 2 to a Level 3, with an emphasis on problem solving, making connections, good questioning and key vocabulary in *The Ontario Curriculum*)
- **mathematics problem solving** (emphasizing students demonstrating their learning through words, numbers and pictures and providing all grades with a set of activity cards to supplement their program)
- **assessment and evaluation** (emphasizing effective ways to assess students and track their progress)

Student achievement

We assess all students immediately on their arrival at Forest Manor. We have an ESL package and a regular package for this evaluation. In addition, we used our ESL allocation and our special education allocation to create a Resource Reception Centre.

If a child does not speak English at all, we provide intensive ESL classes. We also have a resource teacher at each grade level, who works closely with the classroom teachers. We have excellent tracking for language and mathematics achievement in every grade, and we monitor every child's progress closely, so that we can provide immediate support when it is needed.

We have examined the reading of Grade 6 boys in our school and have employed literature circles for three years. We watch the material the boys choose, and we have carefully considered what hooks them into reading. As well, we have students read in mixed groups, gender-specific groups and interest groups.

In the primary grades, we have a consistent language program, Jolly Phonics, in senior kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2. We also use Book Shop to do guided, shared and individual reading in these grades.

We are also consistent in the junior grades with, for example, reading for multiple purposes (using Nelson and Gage anthologies for information from fiction and non-fiction). In addition, we promote reading for pleasure through several reading clubs (e.g., Silverbirch, Accelerated Reader) and engaging novel studies.

Team approach

Most important, we work in teams. Teachers and resource teachers collaborate in all aspects of their planning and teaching. (For example, we have math journals in every classroom.) As a result, we achieve consistency across grades and throughout the school.

We talk about our results (EQAO and other data) as a staff. We look at the particulars and focus our efforts. Twice a month, we have Curriculum Cafés (e.g., presentations on reading for pleasure, social studies exemplars, math games, art appreciation and critical thinking, the Toronto District School Board writing document, poetry and equity) organized and presented by staff members.

The staff are kept informed about issues, new developments and important curriculum information; new documents are not just put into teachers' mailboxes.

We take a great deal of pride in the strong systems we have put in place. I believe we can say that none of our students fall through the cracks.

Debbie Smith
Principal

St. Brigid Catholic Elementary School, Hamilton-Wentworth CDSB

Our profile

- An urban-core school in Hamilton
- Approximately 400 students, of predominately Portuguese background
- While ESL is not a major issue, many of the students come from homes where English is not the primary language spoken, and many students have after-school care delivered by non-English-speaking adults
- There is a high level of special education involvement, and many students have an IPRC designation
- Our school population is somewhat transient
- Reading Recovery and Early Intervention programs are in place

Our EQAO results

	2001–2002		2002–2003		2003–2004	
	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6
Number of students	37	33	36	55	42	56
Exempted students (all three subjects)	3%	0%	22%	9%	12%	14%
Percentage at Level 3 or above:						
Reading	30%	30%	25%	22%	60%	38%
Writing	57%	27%	17%	24%	38%	38%
Mathematics	41%	24%	8%	18%	21%	43%

Key factors in our improvement

- Intensive professional development
- Focus on reading as a "cornerstone" skill for writing and mathematics achievement
- A team approach to professional learning and school improvement
- Choice of school resources driven by individual teacher need
- Use of EQAO data to determine student achievement deficits
- Use of EQAO data as a basis for school-wide improvement planning

Our story

Three years ago, during the 2001–2002 school year, we became involved in two projects that asked us to consider how we delivered literacy education in our classrooms. One was the Ministry's *Support for Schools That Need Extra Help* program. The second was a pilot project of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, a literacy initiative that predated the Ministry's Early Reading Strategy.

Both of these programs offered us the opportunity to hear about the latest thinking regarding literacy education and gave us access to professional learning that was at the forefront of current practice. They presented us

with a balanced literacy framework from which we could begin to develop our own thoughts and ideas about how best to meet the educational needs of the students of St. Brigid School and put these ideas into practice.

Initially, the focus of everything we did was reading. Although our EQAO scores were low in all three areas—reading, writing and mathematics—reading became the cornerstone of our work, based on the belief that students needed to gain competency in reading to improve the other two areas.

From the outset, our professional learning occurred as a team. We found that it was important that we each hear the same message and that we return to school to discuss it and, based on our experience, decide how it could contribute to what was best for the children of St. Brigid School. The model of train-the-trainer was not going to be effective for us. It was important that our team of educators, which consisted of the primary classroom teachers and the School Resource Team, work together to add to our collective knowledge base.

As the implementation of new practices progressed, we began to see excellent results from our assessment of the children's reading. Data from Running Record and other classroom assessment showed that our students were reading with increasing ability. In fact, we were surprised when our EQAO results arrived and showed that our students were still performing below provincial expectations. The disconnect between our results and EQAO's caused us to take a more in-depth look at the EQAO data.

As a team, the teachers began the process of critically examining the Individual Student Reports, other EQAO data, the student booklets and the anchor papers when we received them. The teachers of junior kindergarten to Grade 3 examined the kinds of responses our children were offering on the EQAO assessments. We examined the anchor paper responses, and we examined the questions the assessments asked. We discovered, for example, that the students' reading responses were not reaching provincial standard. The students could read words, but they couldn't link them to what they were being asked to do to show comprehension and respond to what they read.

Staff critically looked at the kinds of activities they engaged in with children and at the kinds of questions students were asked in the classroom. Through this analysis, we became aware that our students were capable of reading words but lacked skills in reading comprehension and reading response. As a team, we studied the book *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann, and explored how best to teach reading comprehension.

EQAO data thus became an important vehicle to us in determining what our strategic plan for school improvement planning and, ultimately, student achievement should look like.

In the three years we have worked with these projects, we have come to a vastly different understanding of the place EQAO assessments have in this school. Previously, as a group, we had little or no knowledge of the provincial assessments. Generally we had even less understanding of their relationship to the curriculum we were teaching.

Now, we can look critically at the information EQAO provides to us and use the information to inform the decisions we make for the students in our school. EQAO results have become one more resource that we can use to help our students. Comparing our results to those of other schools does nothing. But there is power in considering our unique results and, as a group, determining how best to meet our students' needs.

The last three years have been a very long but also very rewarding journey for the staff at St. Brigid School. There have been many challenges, much learning and much hard work. School staff members have dedicated an incalculable amount of their own time to critically examining their practices, preparing resources for students and crafting their lessons. The team at St. Brigid has demonstrated exemplary effort and teaching practice. Much work remains, but we are confident that we are on the right track. Our team members have worked to provide the best possible experience for their students.

David Hansen
Principal

The EQAO Assessment Process

In order to fulfill its mandate, EQAO conducts several province-wide assessments, among them the Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

Both of these assessments are conducted annually and involve all Grade 3 and Grade 6 students in publicly funded schools in Ontario. The results of these assessments provide individual, school and school board data on student achievement at two critical stages of elementary education.

EQAO posts board and school results on its Web site for public access. As well, EQAO publishes an annual *Provincial Report on Achievement* for education stakeholders and the general public. Data from the assessments provide valuable information to support improvement planning at the school and school board levels.

Design and development

EQAO education officers work in consultation with educators from across the province in all aspects of the Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments, including design, development, content review, field testing, administration, marking and reporting.

The Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments are developed in keeping with the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* (1993), a document created by representatives of national education institutions and associations and widely endorsed by Canada's education community. Parallel versions of the Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments are developed for English- and French-language schools. The versions have the same number and kinds of reading, writing and mathematics tasks but reflect variations in the curricula for the two languages.

The Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments measure how well students have met the provincial expectations outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8*. The assessments contain performance-based activities requiring written responses and multiple-choice questions through which students can demonstrate what they know and what they can do.

Students are assessed in three key areas:

Reading: using a variety of reading strategies and conventions, understanding concepts, making inferences and connecting ideas.

Writing: using writing strategies and language conventions, understanding assigned tasks, organizing ideas and communicating with the reader.

Mathematics: demonstrating knowledge and skills across the five strands of mathematics: number sense and numeration; measurement; geometry and spatial sense; patterning and algebra; and data management and probability.

Procedures to ensure consistency and validity

EQAO has specific procedures in place to ensure that administration is consistent and fair for all students. Students work independently in a quiet environment, supervised by teachers. Teachers are given a script that must be followed to ensure that a common message is given to all students throughout the province. The conditions of the assessment administration include a time limit.

Students with special needs are provided with accommodations according to EQAO guidelines. ESL and ELD students are provided with special provisions, which are described in EQAO's *Administration Guide, Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics.*

Each school is sent an English- or French-language CD-ROM for use in training teachers to administer the assessments. Additional resources, such as guides and instructions, are provided to ensure the same administrative and accommodation procedures are followed for all students across the province. Quality assurance procedures help ensure that EQAO's assessments produce valid and reliable data.

Administration and marking

The Grades 3 and 6 assessments are conducted annually in May and June. In both grades, students work independently to solve problems, write responses and answer multiple-choice questions. All teachers responsible for administering the assessments receive detailed guidelines in the Teacher's Daily Plans.

The Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments are marked by educators representing all elementary grades. Marking provides teachers with valuable professional development in assessing student achievement.

Levels of achievement

EQAO uses a four-level scale to report on student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. This scale is based on *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8* and sets Level 3 as the provincial standard. Levels 1 and 2 indicate achievement below the provincial standard, while Level 4 indicates achievement beyond the expected standard.

The overall results for each subject are derived by combining the results from the constructed-response section with those from the multiple-choice section. For reading, writing and mathematics the constructed-response result is generated from content and skill areas identified in the curriculum.

Endnotes

1., 3. As of 2003–2004, identification of English as a second language/English literacy development (ESL/ELD) learners is aligned with Ministry of Education ESL/ELD Resource Guide 2001.

2., 4. Students with special needs are students formally identified by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), and/or students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Students whose sole identified exceptionality is giftedness are not included. Beginning in 2004, an IEP (whether the student has been formally identified through an IPRC or not) was instituted as mandatory for the special needs designation. In previous years, this designation included students who had not been formally indentified but whom schools reported as receiving special education remedial support. The data for the previous two years have been recalculated using this year's definition of special needs.

Working together to improve student learning

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is dedicated to working with the education community and to enhancing the quality and accountability of the education system in Ontario. This is achieved through student assessments that produce objective, reliable and relevant information, and through the timely public release of this information along with recommendations for system improvement.

Values

- EQAO values student learning above all other interests.
- EQAO values information that has the potential to bring about constructive change and improvement.
- EQAO values the dedication and expertise of Ontario's educators and works in partnership with them in all of its activities.
- EQAO values the delivery of its programs and services with equivalent quality in both English and French.

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